

TANJORE PAINTINGS

A Chapter in Indian Art History

By

N. S. RAMASWAMI

A KORA'S INDIGENOUS ARTS AND CRAFTS CENTRE

PUBLICATION

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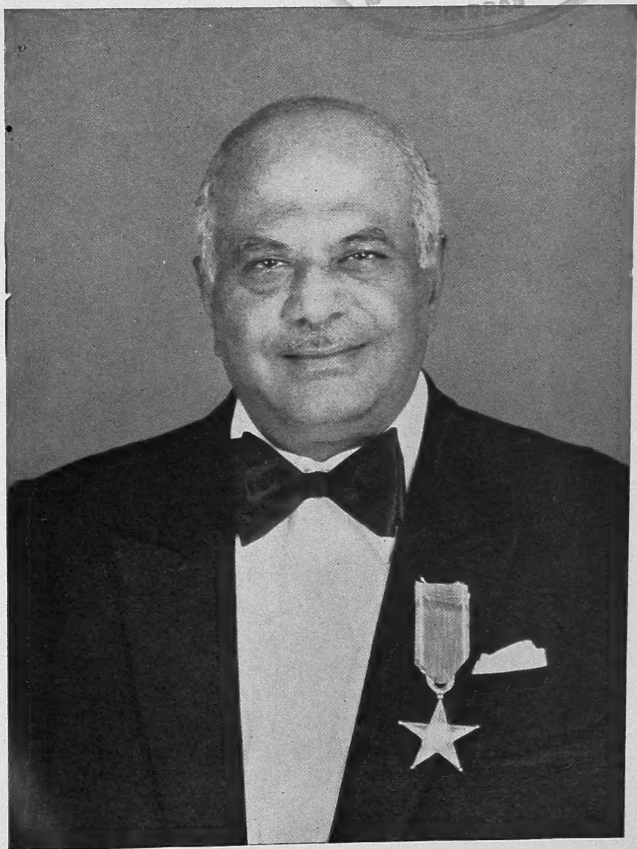


A familiar and beloved theme of the old Tanjore artists. "Navanitha Krishna". In the collection of MR. B. N. Ramachandran of Madras.

5-SEP-1976



• CAV. and Mrs. G. K. Devarajulu of Coimbatore
to whom this work is most gratefully dedicated.



CAV: G. K. Devarajulu of Coimbatore,
the eminent industrialist and patron of arts.

FOREWORD

This book, though slender in volume, is an important addition to the scanty literature relating to the history of later South Indian art. It deals with what is compendiously known as the Tanjore school of painting which flourished under the patronage of the Nayak and Mahratta princes in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. The traditions of that school still survive, the descendants of the original artists persisting in the preservation of the old techniques.

It was to study the history of the present state of Tanjore school of painting and to gather as much material as is possible on the subject that both Sri Koduru Ramamurthi and Sri N. S. Ramaswami went to places like Tanjore, Tiruchirapalli, and Madurai. A distinctive art had flourished in those regions which included painting on wood, glass and mica, renovating murals in temples and colouring "vahanas" and 'sudai' sculptures on gopuras and vimanas. The art was practised by two main communities, namely the Rajus in Tanjore and Tiruchi and the Nayudus in Madurai. This aspect serves to illustrate the national integration that prevailed when Telugu speaking communities and artists speaking Telugu at home became one with Tamil life. The famous instance of Tyagaraja can be mentioned in this connection.

Sri Ramaswami has given an interesting account of the different techniques practised by the artists belonging to the Tanjore school with illustrations in black and white and in colour. The themes, which range from mythological subjects like Navanee-tha Krishna to portrait painting, are evident from these illustrations.

The book is considerably enriched by the reproductions of the original paintings by Kora himself, adopting the Tanjore technique.

Though extremely catholic in his appreciation of the traditions of the various schools of painting, Indian and foreign, Kora has his roots in the soil. He and his art in ways more than one belong to the village, which, after all, is the heart of India.

I heartily welcome this publication. I cannot refrain from paying my tribute to the patronage of the eminent industrialist, Sri G. K. Devarajulu and Smt. Devarajulu of Coimbatore, to whom this book is appropriately dedicated.

Madras, }
2-8-1976. }

Dr. P. V. RAJAMANNAR

INTRODUCTION

By M. Anantanarayanan
Former Chief Justice of Madras

I have great pleasure in acceding to the request of my friend, Sri Koduru Ramamurthi, in furnishing an introduction to this truly delightful work "Tanjore Paintings—a Chapter in Indian Art History". I have known Sri Koduru Ramamurthi for years, both as a revivalist of the almost lost and lovely art of "Kalamkari" painting on textiles, particularly as the craft was traditionally practised in the region of Kalahasthi (Andhra Pradesh) and as an innovator of this art in the modern idiom of portraits and landscapes. Not content with this achievement, Sri Ramamurthi has tirelessly worked further to create assemblages of wood - carvings and woodcraft in a highly individualistic technique. Certain of the pieces of miniature temples six or eight feet high, rathas, treasure-chests, that he has so created are worthy to find a place in any museum of exciting art works that are true, nevertheless, to the Hindu tradition. Latterly he has been engaged for some years in a revival of the nearly lost art of Tanjore paintings upon glass, wood or stretched silk and paper. Here again he has utilised the tradition to innovate. His pieces are not repetitions, but originals. The "Gesso" backgrounds and forms are in three-dimensional relief. The inset coloured stones and gems are highly decorative and strangely reminiscent of "the gorgeous East".

Sri N. S. Ramaswami's delightful travelogue is the narrative of a joint exploration. It contains little known information of Tanjore art under the Nayak and Mahratta kings, the influence of the East India Company portrait-painters on

Tanjore art, and a great deal of the techniques of these craftsmen and miniaturists, several of whom are living today, though in humble circumstances and obscurity. The book makes very pleasant reading. But this is primarily an album of pictures, and I wish to write about the pictures.

II

There is a great deal of aesthetic theory today upon "What is Art". Certain neurophysiological and psychological channels of perception have been illuminated by deep research. But the central problem, the kernel, remains as much of an enigma as ever. Are there objective criteria at all? Why does a certain painting excite my sensibilities, another leave me cold? I can learn about art, cultivate new modes of perception, but still find it inexplicable why there is deep pleasure in looking at some works of art, not in others. Are these associational responses? But I can still admire a painting by Mondrian or Jackson Pollock that evokes no such responses at all. Tanjore paintings are deeply rooted in tradition and still innovative within limits. These master craftsmen were content to be humble and anonymous. The art was sacred, dedicated. Like a great deal of Chinese art, it was a world in miniature; "to see the world in a grain of sand" was their perspective. The aim was to gently awaken a mood of holiness, not to stun or bewilder.

Those who dislike primitive art, or naivete in art, may turn away from these pictures. But they would be wrong, for primitive art has been a major influence in western modern art. Masters like Picasso, Matisse, Gauguin, Arp, have frankly acknowledged this. Consider a traditional painting in colour like "Baby Krishna with mother Yasodha". Maternal tenderness and the suckling baby's dependence have been brought out effectively by the simplest of means. The line is most economical, most controlled. The ink-sketch, "A Prank by Lord Krishna", depicts the embarrassment and devotion of the Gopis with a pure, touching candour. The outline drawing

of the Devi exhibits a control of line that is masterly, though traditional. Some of the face portraits, indisputably influenced by portraitists who came here from Europe, have an exquisite delicacy of colour and touch. I have seen many of the originals.

III

Of Sri Ramamurthi's own work, I shall not write much. The paintings speak for themselves, to the sensitive. But it does seem to me that "Virahini" (colour), "Star world" (colour, landscape) and "Devadasi" (colour) do provide evidence of how greatly a sensitive artist's use of "Gesso", relief, colour (oils) and gem-stone inset as adornments, can evoke new, exciting forms of art that are still deeply rooted in our own traditions and culture. We cannot repudiate our precious inheritance ; Sri Ramamurthi at least will never do so.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

This book is the first of a number which Kora's Indigenous Arts and Crafts Centre has decided to publish embodying the researches it is undertaking into the history and technique of the folk arts of south India. The centre has for its objects the promotion of our folk arts and crafts. For centuries, it has been through these that the artistic spirit and sensibilities of our common people have expressed themselves. They have been a valuable complement to what may be called the higher arts of temple architecture, sculpture and painting.

The Director of the Centre, Mr. Koduru Ramamurthi, the well known artist, has been involved in the fostering and personal practice of folk arts since his boyhood. It is a matter of pride to him that he has played a prominent part in the revival of two folk arts which were on the verge of disappearance, Tanjore paintings and "kalamkari" cloth making.

The centre wishes to convey its heartfelt gratitude to Mr. G. K. Devarajulu. As Chairman of Lakshmi Mills, Coimbatore, he is one of our leading industrialists. He takes keen interest in the graces of life, and he has been a discriminating patron of the arts. To him the book is most gratefully dedicated.

Dr. P. V. Rajamannar and Mr. M. Anantanarayanan, both former Chief Justice of Madras High Court, have contributed a foreword and an introduction to this book. The centre thanks them for their kindness.

Gratitude is also due to Mr. Radhakrishna, Editor of "Andhra Patrika" and "Bharathi", for encouraging the Tanjore style by publishing many of the paintings in those publications. Mr. Radhakrishna's father, Mr. Shambu Prasad, was also a discriminating patron. It is gratitude to recall this at this moment.

Thanks are due to a number of the centre's patrons who have permitted it to reproduce in this book Mr. Ramamurthi's paintings which are now in their collections; Mr. Jayavardhanavelu in respect of "Virahini"; Dr. Helmut Ploog of West Germany; Mr. Naresh Kotak, of Madras, in respect of "Devadasi"; Mr. Balakrishna Shetty concerning "Mahishasuramardhani"; Mr. Sitharama Rao of Madras, for "Mother and Child"; Mr. T. N. Murari, of Madras, who has allowed it to reproduce mica paintings; Mrs. Padma Sundaram, of Madras, in respect of "Baby Krishna with Mother Yasodhara"; Mr. D. H. Captain of Madras for "Vikasithapushpa"; and Mr. B. N. Ramachandran of Madras for "Navanitha Krishna".

PREFACE

This monograph is a study of what is generally called the Tanjore school of paintings, an idiom followed widely in southern Tamilnad in the past two centuries, but now only fitfully and rather precariously. I have been familiar with these paintings, particularly of Navanitha Krishna, from my boyhood.

I have often wondered what the modern Indian artist thinks of his predecessor. The contemporary fashions are all from the west. Why should this be so? Is it because our idioms of the past have become obsolete or because it is felt that they cannot express today's ethos? Certainly the modern artist does not think highly of, say, Pallava or Chola art.

To my delight, for I am a traditionalist, I found that there is an exception. This is Mr Koduru Ramamurthi. He has two reputations. The first, of course, is as an artist of national renown and achievement. The second is as a promoter and reviver of many indigenous arts which were in danger of disappearing. Unlike most of his contemporaries, he is rooted in the ideals of the past. One of his passions is village arts which he, of village origin himself, has known closely for years. I learnt that he had done much to revive "kalamkari" cloth making and village wood carving. What was to my present purpose, he had also fostered Tanjore painting. He, if anybody today does, knows about its technique and history, I anticipated fruitful results from meeting contemporary Tanjore artists in southern Tamilnad in his company. For one thing, he knows many of them, and for another an artist would speak more freely to another artist than to a stranger.

This was why, in Mr. Ramamurthi's company, I visited Tanjore, Tiruchi, Srirangam, and Madurai in March, 1976. We met many artists. What they told us is related in the following

pages. But it has also been necessary to add a history of their art, of its old eminent practitioners, and of their methods of working. Nor can the Tanjore school be understood without some knowledge of what had gone before, in the Nayak times from about the sixteenth century.

It is a matter of satisfaction to me that I have been able to add a few facts to the art history of these centuries. It is as a chapter in the history of artistic evolution in this part of India that I have conceived this monograph.

I must thank Mr. Ramamurthi for giving of his time in his journey with me. It is not often that an author is able to study an art with an eminent practitioner of it by his side.

Mr. K. Krishna Murari Rao helped me a great deal in the preparation of this book. My thanks are due to him.

N.S.Ramaswami

CHAPTER I

“ The Moochie Man. This tribe is one of the most useful in India; they are excellent copyists. They gain their livelihood by painting and working in leather”. It is thus that an unknown hero of Indian art is introduced in a collection of drawings made by a Tanjore artist about 1822, now in the old India Office Library, London.

Until recently, anonymity has been the lot of Hindu artists. They have produced some of the most brilliant effects in the history of art, but the names of only a few of them have survived. A few of the exuberant Hoysala sculptors have so far yielded to the human craving for recognition that they have incised their names on their creations. Perhaps the greatest of them, Jagannachari, has been enveloped in tradition and myth. In an earlier century the names of eight artists who probably made the Mamallapuram monuments were carved on a boulder. A ninth is known to us as Lalitalaya, as recorded in Dandin's “ Avantisundarikatha”.

The old Hindu artists would not have considered lack of recognition a serious deprivation. They were quite content to sink their identity in the common task of clothing the truths of their religion in the garb of art. The manuals expect this subordination of the self in the common endeavour. They provide elaborate directions on the making of temples, but there is no suggestion that the individual identity of the maker should be blazoned forth.

This is easily understood. Hindu philosophy, of which Hindu art is an offshoot, cares little for individual personality. The goal of the Hindu is absorption in Brahman, the World Soul, and loss of individual identity is an object of “sadhana”. Artists, no more than others, need individual recognition.

Though temples have been built, sculptures made and paintings created in India for over two millennia, the available literary and epigraphical references to artists are scanty. It needed an unusual king like Mahendra I, the Pallava, to state the fact, and even that only obliquely, that before his time temples in Tamilnad had been built of brick, wood, mortar and other perishable materials. The Kailasa temple in Ellora is such a magnificent creation that it broke down the recognised, even statutory, anonymity of its makers. According to an inscription, its architect himself was astonished that he could have created such a superb temple. Only in exceptional cases like these would the Hindu artist abandon anonymity. Nearly all the architectural and sculptural manuals are of anonymous authorship. The passion for anonymity was carried so far that in philosophy original works often took the form of "commentaries" on older books.

This ethos has disappeared in India today. The modern Indian likes "publicity" quite as much as could be wished or feared. He also desires to know something about the lives and personalities of those in the past who have delighted him with chisel and palette. Nothing about the Pallava, Pandya, Chola or Vijayanagar artists can be recovered today. But it is different with the Nayak and Tanjore Maratha artists. They were nearer to us in time. Moreover, their descendants, many still persisting in the old professions against odds, have preserved useful traditions and memories. It is possible to recover at least some pages of a chapter of Indian art which, unless care is taken betimes, may well be lost totally.

It was with this object that Mr Koduru Ramamurthi and I sought out a few of the artists of whom he knew in Tanjore, Tiruchi, Madurai and a few other places in March, 1976. Mr Ramamurthi, well known as "Kora", is one of the best known and most versatile of our contemporary artists. He combines a passion for art history and forms with his own considerable gifts as an artist. In this he has been true to his upbringing. Born in a Rayalaseema village in a family of traditional scholars, he learnt early to find beauty and significance in rural arts. He was fascinated by the puppet shows of his youth. He was

KONNEMARA PUBLIC LIBRARY
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Saraswathi-a paper Painting of the Tanjore School. In the collection of Kora's Indigenous Arts and Crafts Centre



A prank by Lord Krishna. This ink sketch by a Tanjore artist is in the collection of Mr. Jayavardhanavelu, of Coimbatore.

RAMAMURTHI PICTURE LIBRARY
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This Tanjore painting, "Devadasi", is notable for its expressive power as well as for the unusual embossing substances which Mr. Ramamurthi has applied. In the collection of Mr. Naresh Kotak, of Madras.

also attracted by the wood carvers who even today create wonderful art. But his artistic passions have been the making of "kalamkari" cloth and the Tanjore school of painting.

India's preeminence in cloth making dates from the dawn of recorded history. Its various regions have produced kinds of cloth which the rest of the world admired. In the seventeenth century the Andhra area excelled in manufacturing "kalamkari" cloth. Masulipatam was the centre of this manufactory. Near the confluence of the Krishna with the sea there grew a wild plant which yielded the excellent natural colours used in making this cloth. The British, the Dutch, the French and even the Danes established "factories" in Masulipatam and other towns nearby to commission and sell this cloth. The Sultan of Golconda, in whose kingdom Masulipatam lay, was also greatly interested in this trade.

"Kalamkari" cloth became popular in north India, Iran and Europe. Many visitors to India of those times like Bernier refer to it. Even puritanical Aurangzeb used it as linings in his tents. Two broad "kalamkari" styles developed, one influenced by the Andhra ethos, the other by the Muslim. Temples commissioned the first type. The second was popular in the Golconda and other Muslim courts in India, and also in Iran. A few examples travelled to Britain, and there are appreciative references to them by Pepys and Evelyn.

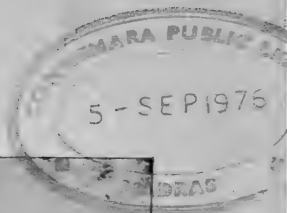
The cloth is still being manufactured in Masulipatam. Another centre has developed in Srikalahasti. Blocks are used in Masulipatam, but in Srikalahasti the artists draw the outlines by hand. It is believed that water of the Swarnamukhi river, on the banks of which Srikalahasti stands, helps in making the cloth attractive and durable.

Mr Ramamurthi played a prominent part in rescuing and fostering what was a dying art in Srikalahasti. Serving for nine long years as Honorary Director of a Government institute set up there to revive the art, he worked indefatigably and succeeded in placing the manufactory on a firm footing. Religious themes alone are embodied in the cloth made in Srikalahasti. "Secular" subjects are used in Masulipatam.

Mr. Ramamurthi's interest in handicrafts deepened with his experiences in Srikalahasti. He has himself produced many striking "kalamkari" cloths and he has also taught the art to a few select pupils. His interest then extended to wood carvings. To this day wood sculpture is little regarded even in artistic circles. Principals of art colleges say that they find it difficult to muster enough students for the woodwork classes. Yet, the art has had a grand history. Unknown and unsung, many artisans in villages are still creating remarkable art. Mr. Ramamurthi values their creations not only for themselves, but also as parts of "compositions" in the making of which he excels. Out of odds and ends he conjures up striking creations. Utilising old lintels, small metal coverings, miniature carvings and the like, he produces new visions of gopuras, vimanas, stupas, doorways and the like.

But Mr. Ramamurthi's interest in wood carving is not confined to its value as oddments. He has a fine collection of wooden carvings made by unknown village artists in Salem district, most of them Telugu speaking. In collecting them he has been guided by his instinctive awareness of the importance of village crafts which few of his contemporaries value aright. He is a traditionalist in life and views on art. He cherishes his conservative background, for he knows that its values are more fundamental than the fleeting fashions of today. He has strong views on the deleterious influence of western styles on our indigenous art.

Rooted in the traditional verities of his land and faith, Mr. Ramamurthi endeavours to conserve their values. His own work reflects this ethos. This is an age of transition in the history of Indian art. Foreign, not to say outlandish, styles and ideas have been introduced, but they have made little headway. On the other hand, the old values, those which held the field for two thousand years and more, are in decay. Modern art makes little popular appeal, old art lingers on like an unloved guest. Mr. Ramamurthi has made it his mission to conserve the old, accepting some desirable features from the new. Hence his experiments in adapting "kalamkari" cloth making and Tanjore paintings to modern uses.



"Raja Sarfoji of Tanjore", a pencil sketch by a Tanjore palace artist, now in the collection of Kora's Indigenous Arts and Crafts Centre.



This fine portrait study of an old man, made by a Tanjore artist, is in the collection of Kora's Indigenous Arts and Crafts Centre.



"Sandhya raga" is a fine example of Mr. Ramamurthi's versatility in adapting the Tanjore technique of painting. Not only is the theme a new one, but the embossing substances used are new ones which have lent the work the effects of a watercolour. In the artist's collection.

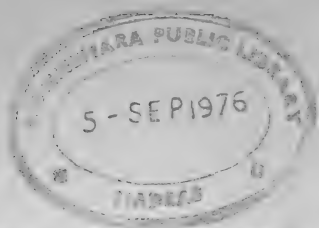
Andhra lineage. They have no notion of which part of the country their ancestors came from. But it is possible that these emigrated from Rayalaseema and the Bellary region. The Archers record that they heard of an oral tradition that there was an influx from Hyderabad in the seventeenth century. We did not hear of this. It seems unlikely.

These Rajus and Nayudus speak Telugu at home. But, of course, they have fully integrated themselves with the Tamil life around them. Most of them are of a pious disposition and continue to follow the prescribed rituals.

The ancestors of these artists must have come over in the wake of the Nayaks of Madurai and Tanjore. There have been many immigrations in the history of Tamilnad. It was probably after Kumara Kampanna reconquered Madurai from the Sultans and made it a Vijayanagar viceroyalty that the first Andhras and Kannadigas arrived. Kampanna's earliest record in the Tamil districts is dated 1332. His "Mahapradhani" was Somappa Dannayaka. Among his other chief officers were Gandaragulu Marayya Nayaka, Anegondi Vittappar, Gopanaraya and Saluva Mangu. It is reasonable to believe that a number of Andhras and Kannadigas followed these officers to the Tamil region.

When, in the sixteenth century, the Nayak viceroyalties of Madurai and Tanjore were set up (the third, that of Gingee, does not figure much in this art history, though the Ramayana paintings in the Chengam temple were created under the patronage of these rulers), this migration was strengthened and with it the artistic influence. What Visvanatha in Madurai and Sevappa in Tanjore created were Andhra-Kannadiga kingdoms, thinly disguised as viceroyalties. The courts encouraged literature and the pious arts. Artists were needed to build and embellish the temples that were springing up.

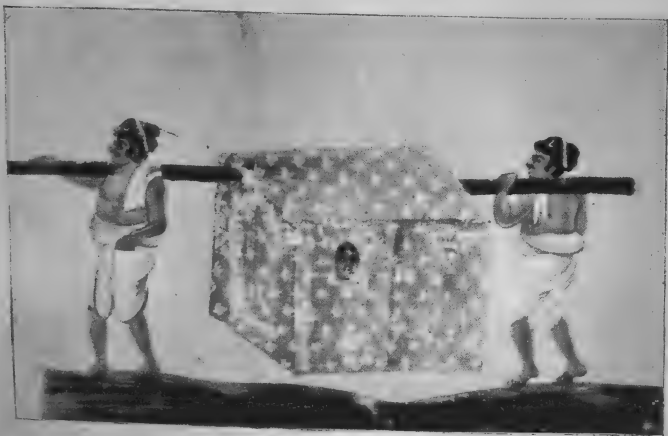
The Tanjore artists whom we met are, significantly enough, none of them an architect or a sculptor. Their tradition has been one of painting and what may be called the auxiliary temple arts. They say that they are continuing to practise the profes-



"View of the Tanjore palace". A water colour by a Tanjore artist. In the collection of Kora's Indigenous Arts and Crafts Centre.



Depicting on old mode of carrying things, this mica painting is in the collection of Timeri Nrupendar Murari.



This mica painting was made by a Tanjore artist. It is now in the collection of Mr. Murari, Madras.

sions which their forefathers followed. It seems likely that the Andhra and Kannadiga artists who followed the Vijayanagar viceroys and the Nayaks were mostly, if not all painters.

This lends a clue to a solution of the problem why the Nayaks should have found it necessary to bring artists with them. At no time in its history has Tamilnad been deficient in art. Its temples are among the finest and the grandest in the world, and its sculptures are among the most delicate or heroic of creations. Why could it have been necessary to bring artists from other parts of the empire to a region rich in art from time immemorial?

The explanation seems to be twofold. The distinctive Tanjore arts of painting on wood, glass and mica date only from the Mahratta or, stretching the matter a little, from Nayak times. No example from any previous period has survived. It is clear that these arts were not practised before the Mahrattas and the Nayaks. None of the innumerable inscriptions, none of the books, contains the slightest reference to those arts or, if the word be preferred, handicrafts.

Likewise, there could have been little scope for "sudai" painting much before the Nayaks or the later Pandyas. It was under Vijayanagar rule that as a rule, huge gopuras began to be built. There are earlier ones in Chidambaram, Madurai, Jambukesvaram and a few other temples. But it was the Vijayanagar Rayas and the Nayaks who, as a matter of course, added gopuras to the innumerable temples they built. There was comparatively little scope for the making or colouring of "sudai" sculptures on gopuras and vimanas before their time.

The first Amman shrine seems to have been built in the Gangaikondacholapuram temple in the reign of Rajendra I, the Chola, in the eleventh century. But some scholars argue that these shrines appear only from Vijayanagar times. Shrines for subsidiary deities were erected from the beginning of the Chola imperium, to judge from the remnants in Nartamalai and Tirukkattalai. But except in great temples like Gangaikonda,

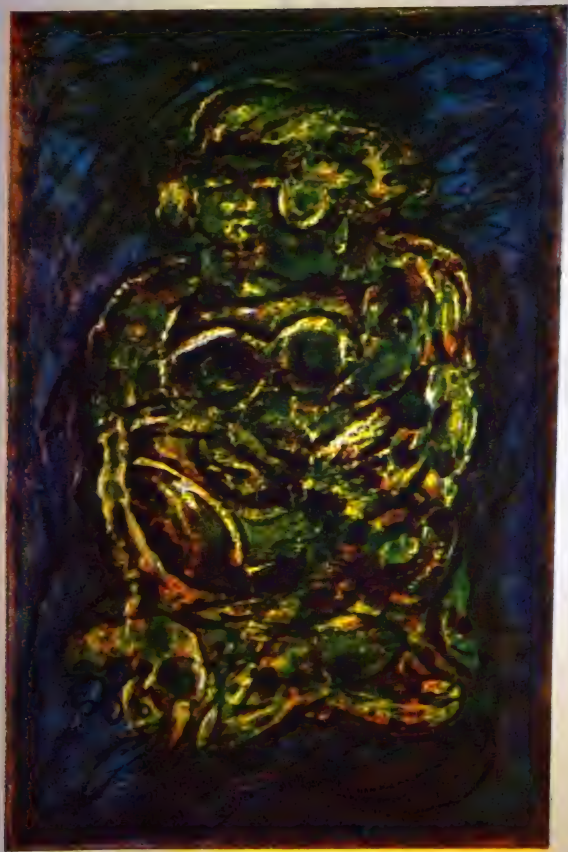
cholapuram the vimanas are of a few "talas", with no scope for profusion of "sudais."

If Vijayanagar and Nayak art is flamboyant, abounding, even luxuriating, in decoration, and overflowing in architecture, it is true to the spirit of the times. The empire was a brilliant one, but it was always imperilled. Muslim invaders were ever waiting at the gate to attack and destroy, a fear more than amply come true after Tallikota. Those brilliant, but insecure, times found expression in the profusion of decoration on the buildings the people held most dear, the temples.

There was little of this feeling under the Cholas except towards the end of empire. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, when the Chola flag flew from the Tungabhadra to Dondra Head, from the Laccadives to the isles of Java, the Chola land was free of invasion. Vikramaditya VI, the Kalyani Chalukya, did invade Kanchi and the capital about 1070, but that was a mere raid with ultimate results highly unfavourable to the invader. It was only when the empire was tottering to its fall, the strong hand of Kulothunga III having been removed by death, that it was frequently invaded until the Pandyas finally annexed it.

It is when a people feel threatened, when they lead a debile life, glorious indeed but highly insecure, that their art becomes complicated. In most of the Chola times there was no great scope for the purely decorative and, in a sense, adventitious arts. The artists most in demand were architects and sculptors in stone.

This was probably why, when the Nayaks began their brilliant, but chequered career, they could not find many local artists experienced in the subsidiary temple arts. They could have had no choice but invite artists from Andhradesa and Karnataka of Tamilnad. In Andhradesa and Karnataka the art situation was different at the time. By the sixteenth century, the artists of those regions had erected the minutely carved and flamboyant Vijayanagar temples, where not a little of Hoysala intricacy has survived. The great paintings of Lepakshi had been created. There were innumerable artists in Karnataka and Andhradesa



"Fisherwoman" another Tanjore-style painting, recaptures the rugged spirit of the theme. In the artist's collection.

who could provide what was not available adequately in Tamilnad.

It is further possible that some of the artists who migrated to Tamilnad were from the Muslim courts of Deccan. A number of Hindu artists made many of the celebrated Deccan miniatures. But there must have been some who felt ill at ease in that environment and welcomed the opportunity of working in a more congenial atmosphere.

A third likely reason is the human tendency for people to prefer artists of their own ethos. The Nayaks must have thought that Andhra and Kannada artists would follow their directions and interpret their desires better than the local ones until the latter became accustomed to supplying the new needs.

It is a significant fact that only a few temple murals of times anterior to the Nayaks have survived today. While it is true as a general rule that the temples of every age were painted, this was particularly so under the Nayaks in the Tamil districts. Only the Pallava paintings of the Kailasanatha temple in Kanchipuram and Panamalai, the Pandya paintings of Sittannavasal and Tirumalaipuram, and the Chola works of Tanjore and Nartamalai are older than the Nayak examples available today. On the other hand, there is if not a wealth, at least a sufficiency, of Nayak and Mahratta paintings. Most of the older paintings were lost in the passage of time, but it was the Nayaks who provided an intimate and familiar impetus to the art.

This may be deduced from the fact that a number of temples in Karnataka and Andhradesa of Vijayanagar times contain murals. They include Hampi, Tadpatri, Macherla, and Somapalle. The Nayaks brought this acquired taste with them to the Tamil region. Nothing could have been more natural than that they should have turned to artists experienced in this tradition.

CHAPTER III

Before discussing the contemporary descendants of these artists who came over with the Nayaks, at various times beginning with the sixteenth century, it is necessary to describe the state of religious art under the Nayaks, their successors in Tanjore, the Mahrattas and the later rulers in the last four centuries. This account will show that there was considerable scope for these artists in those times and that, if today their descendants are languishing, it is because they lack the patronage which enabled their forefathers to liberate their skill.

The history of art of this period in this region begins as a normal continuation of the old Chola and Pandya traditions of temple building. The Nayaks and the Mahrattas built many new temples and renovated a number of old ones. There was scope both for the better regarded architects and sculptors and for what may be called the lesser temple artists. (This distinction which seems so obvious today was not always valid in the old centuries, for often the same man was architect, sculptor, painter and anything else. This tradition of what would now be regarded as versatility dates back at least to the Pallava days of Lalitalaya, who, Dandin's "Avantisundarikatha" states, could construct ninety-six kinds of temples and six kinds of mechanical contrivances. He made "mechanical men" and exhibited a mock fight among them. He could also create artificial rain. He wrote books and was a soldier. Astonishing as this list may seem, his father was even more wonderful. He was superior to the "Yavanas", or foreigners, in making artificial devices and had astounded a king by creating a "mechanical wish yielding tree").

Considerable additions were made to the great temples in Madurai and Srirangam in Nayak times. Some other fanes also were added to or renovated. Not a few were built anew. Inscriptions mention these facts.



"Muslim mendicant". A water colour painting made by a Tanjore artist. In the collection of Kora's Indigenous Arts and Crafts Centre.



This colour study of a European woman by a Tanjore artist is in the collection of Kora's Indigenous Arts and Crafts Centre.

An epigraph, dated 1553, records a gift of land by Krishnappa Nayak, the son of Visvanatha Nayak, for worship in, and repairs to, the Tyagarajaswami temple in Ambasamudram, then called Idakal. Nine years later the same Nayak made a similar gift to the same temple. The Sri Minakshi temple in Madurai contains an inscription, of 1584, recording the construction of the celebrated "Kambattadi mandapa", with a number of sculptured pillars, in the reign of Virappa Nayak, the son of Krishnappa Nayak I. One of these pillars contains the finest of Nayak sculptures, the scene depicting the marriage of Minakshi and Siva. (The Subramania shrine in the Big Temple in Tanjore is the most striking example of Nayak religious architecture.) There are also representations of Siva as Nataraja, Dakshinamurthi, Ardhanarisvara, Chandrasekhara, Rishabaruda, Sankaranarayana, Bikshatana, Rudra and Somaskanda.

In 1594 a subordinate of Virappa Nayak built the temple of "Kadirinaga (natha) Perumal" and a tank in Periyakottai. There is a record dated 1608 of the building of the Ramalingesvara temple in Ramesvaram. Thirty-six years later there is an epigraphical reference to the gift of a village, named Aladiyur, for repairs to one of the gopuras in the Madurai temple. The other great fane in Nayak dominions, in Ramesvaram, had been added to in 1623, Kuttan Setupathi Katta Thevar having built the "nadamalika mandapam" and the "Arudhra mandapam" there.

The temple, with the imposing gopura, of Kasivisvesvara was built on the hill in Tiruchengode in 1663. An inscription in Satyamangalam, dated 1676, records the construction by Chikkadevaraja of Mysore of a temple for Lord Kumara on Dhavalagiri hill, at the confluence of the Bhavani and the Chintamani. Another Mysore king, Krishnaraja Udayar, erected a temple to Lord Gopala in Tali (Dharmapuri district), as late as in the eighteenth century. To the same century belong the Krishna temple in Srivilliputtur and a gopura in the temple in Brahmadesam (Tirunelveli district).

More vividly than the inscriptions does a Tamil chronicle, "Maduraiittala Varalaru", describe the progress of art under

Tirumalai Nayak, the greatest of the Nayaks, who ruled from about 1623 to 1659. It states that he "became very deserving of the grace of Minakshisundaresvara and made several gifts of jewellery, built the Pudumandapa and a tank for the annual floating festival, constructed a gold plated throne, an ivory worked car, a great Stone seat and a throne set with rubies. He ordered several structures to be added to the seven great temples, gifted land with an income of 44,000 *pon* for the daily worship, and tax-free villages for the maintenance of servants and managers. He further made his individual daily gift of food and conducted the festivals on a grand scale.

"He constructed a new car for Lord Azagar for His Chitra festival and made the temple celebrated. Whenever he went there to worship, he used to make a votive offering of 1,000 *pon* as *padakanikkai* for worship and offerings. When the God was taken in procession in Masi Street, he used to offer 1,000 *pon*".

Vijayaranga Chokkanatha, whose effigy in ivory is placed in the "prakara" around the main shrine of Srirangam, was another great benefactor. "Once in the course of his round of visits in the city (Madurai) incognito", says the chronicle, "he noticed that the temple worship, offerings and services were not being properly conducted, and went back to the palace. The next day he sent for all the temple authorities ("sthalattar" and "parijanattar") and enquired why the temple should have become so miserably poor in spite of his gift of land yielding 44,000 *pon*. He grew very angry as no satisfactory explanation was given and confiscated the land under the control of the temple management to the government, sent for the mortgage deeds of the temple management, gave out of the royal treasury 44,000 *pon* for the seven temples for purposes of daily worship, the monthly, annual and other festivals, and ordered a processional car for the Chitra festival. He also made grants of tax-free villages as in the days of Tirumalai Nayak for worship and offerings of food, and arranged for the proper management of the temple affairs".

The chronicle and the inscriptions record but a small part of the artistic activity of the Nayak times. There is no



Sri Rama in a Court scene. A glass painting in the Tanjore style - In the collection of Kora's Indigenous Arts and Crafts Centre.



"Devi". A sketch from Tanjore. In the collection of Kora's Indigenous Arts and Crafts Centre.

contemporary reference to the large number of Nayak paintings which have survived. But it is clear that there was considerable scope for artists as long as the Nayaks were on the throne.

Most Tanjore artists today are essentially painters, and much of what has survived of Nayak art is painting. In fact, apart from the Subramania shrine in the Tanjore Big Temple and the additions to the Madurai temple, it is painting which can be regarded as representative Nayak art. This fact has a bearing on the history of the contemporary descendants of these artists.

Nayak paintings are to be found in the temples of Chidambaram, Tanjore, Madurai, Tiruvarur, Tiruvazanjuli, Ramanathapuram and Kumbakonam. Outside the Tanjore-territory proper, they occur in Chengam and in the Vardhamana temple in Kanchi.

These paintings, some of which are superb art, are a development of the Pallava and Chola traditions, but with a tendency towards decorativeness and some loss of delicacy and bravura. They are essentially a narrative art, depicting continuous stories or episodes, often with explanatory labels. Technically, those belonging to the later Nayak times are but a step away from the works of the descendants of their makers. Few, or no, miniature paintings appear to have been made in Nayak times, but the murals, enclosed in panels, were bound to develop into the portable paintings on wood, ivory and mica, the forte of the Tanjore artists.

The Tanjore Mahratta period, nearer to our own, also abounded in artistic achievements. It was now that the typical form of Tanjore art, the painting on wood embossed and encrusted with precious stones, was evolved. Manuscript paintings also appear, but not plentifully, unlike in western India, and not destined to flourish in later times. There are some examples of this art in the Sarasvathi Mahal Library, in Tanjore, which King Sarfoji set up and developed. This monarch, who reigned from 1798 to 1832, played an important part in the history of the art of his times.

A Sanskrit work, "Prabotha Chandrodayam" has paintings, in a few of its pages. Other texts dealing with elephants and horses have some. There is a portrait of Sarfoji in a treatise on elephants. There is the work of a painter named Madhava-svami in Marathi translations of the "Mahabharatha" and the "Bhagavatha". They are dated 1824. A provision, as it were, of the modern paintings on wood occurs in the pictures added to the covers of every part of an edition of the Rig Veda made in Sarfoji's time. There are drawings of Gods and Goddesses on the wooden covers used to assemble the leaves together.

An interesting record of a purchase of a painting by Sarfoji occurs in an inscription in the Tanjore Big Temple. It states that on January, 29, 1802, Bhujangarao Harirao bought, on behalf of the king, a painting from Udayagiri for Rs. 1,233. There are portraits of its author, Narayana Sudhi, in a work called "Saptabhushanam" and of Shivaji, Ramdas and others in a Marathi book, "Atmaraja Grantham". Sarfoji had his birds and horses drawn by artists. The great Tamil savant, Dr U. V. Swaminatha Iyer, has recorded that in 1869 he saw a portrait of Varahur Gopala Bhagavathar and was thrilled by it.

Glass and ivory carvings and paintings were made in large numbers, a few of which have survived. We saw in Tiruchi an ivory portrait of Viraraghavalu Raju, who painted, or repainted, the murals in the Sri Ramaswami temple in Kumbakonam. There is a particularly striking portrait of Sarfoji in the Tanjore palace. The Sarasvathi Mahal Library contains many embossed and encrusted Tanjore paintings, particularly of Baby Krishna.

Sarfoji was also a builder. To him we owe the Ganesa shrine in the Tanjore Big Temple. He also renovated parts of the northern corridor. It was at this time that the paintings on its walls must have been added. There are also Mahratta paintings of the Rajas in the Subramania shrine. The "Devi Mahatmyam" paintings in the shrine of the Goddess and the layer superimposed over the Chola masterpieces around the sanctum of the Lord are of Nayak times.

Sarfoji set up two pillars in Pattukottai and Setubava-satram with an inscription in English, "His Highness Maharaja



"Baby Krishna with mother Yashodhara" is a painting on glass in the traditional Tanjore style. In the collection of Mrs. Padma Sundaram of Madras.

of Tanjore, the friend and ally of the British Government, erected this column to commemorate the triumph of the British arms and the downfall of Bonaparte in A.D. 1814". In Orathanad he built two sacrificial halls and a feeding house. On the pilgrim road to Ramesvaram he dug many tanks. These public works ensured that artists in his kingdom did not lack employment.

The king was an assiduous collector of objets d'art. It is to this fact that we owe the Sarasvathi Mahal Library, which contains remarkable collections of books, art and the like. Two foreigners who visited him have left accounts of what they saw. These are useful in helping us to realise that the king employed not only large numbers of artists but also many types of them.

Robinson, who was domestic chaplain to Bishop Heber, wrote of his visit in 1826, "The Rajah received us in his library, a noble room with three rows of pillars and handsomely furnished in the English style. On one side there are portraits of the Maratha dynasty from Shahji to Shivaji, ten book-cases containing a very fair collection of French, English, German, Greek and Latin books, and two others of Maratta and Sanskrit manuscripts. In the adjoining room is an air-pump, an electrifying machine, an ivory skeleton, astronomical instruments, and several other cases of books, many of which are on the subject of medicine, which was for some years his favourite study. He showed us his valuable collection of coins, paintings of flowers and natural history with each of which he seemed to have considerable acquaintance".

Some twenty years earlier, Lord Valentia, a nephew of the Duke of Wellington and the Marquess of Wellesley, then the Governor-General, had met the Raja, who conducted him "to a room he called his drawing room : the walls were covered with paintings and pictures of every possible kind ; it was furnished with English chairs and tables ; and on the latter were paper, colours and every implement of drawing".

A third foreigner, Dr. Claudius Buchanan (not to be confused with the celebrated Buchanan Hamilton, who made a

historic survey of Mysore), visited the Raja in 1806, and was shown a portrait drawn by Sarfoji of Schwartz, a Danish missionary. The Raja commissioned John Flaxman, the great English sculptor, to make a statue of Schwartz.

Though a gifted connoisseur, Sarfoji was not unique in this among his dynasty. From 1729 to 1735 had ruled Tulaja, also called Tukkoji. He too was a man of parts. He wrote a musical drama in Telugu, "Sivakamisundariparinayanatakam" which was published in 1971 from a manuscript in the Sarasvathi Mahal Library. He was a distinguished musicologist. He wrote "Sangita Saramrta", a scientific treatise on the theory and practice of music. He is also believed to have written a number of musical compositions, plays and verses. He called himself "Laksyalaksanakovidah", one who is very proficient in the theory and practice of music. This was a fully justified claim.

When Tulaji was living in Mahadevapatna, near Mannargudi, now a village, but then a place of some importance, he wrote the musical play on the marriage of Goddess Sivakami. He also built a temple there dedicated to Lord Varaha. It contains faint traces of paintings. According to tradition, there were once beautiful "Ramayana" paintings.

There is, thus, ample evidence that, in Mahratta times, artists, be they architects, sculptors or painters, were creatively active.

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This water colour of divinities, made by a Tanjore artist, is in the collection of Kora's Indigenous Arts and Crafts Centre.



This painting on paper depicts a King and a nobleman with a sage. In the collection of Kora's Indigenous Arts and Crafts Centre.

CHAPTER IV

The art history of Tamilnad after the Nayaks had disappeared and the Mahrattas were about to disappear was influenced by the advent of the British. Mahratta rule was extinguished in 1833. This date is of the formal end. Mahratta power had virtually ceased earlier. The Rajas could not cope with the murderous politics of the Carnatic wars, embroiled as they were with the affairs of the British, the French and the Nawabs of Arcot. Nor were many of Rajas models of statesmanship. Farther south, there was chaos in the Madurai region until, in 1801, the British established themselves. The new political power influenced art directly and indirectly.

The British were the only patrons of any importance. They who paid the piper insisted on calling the tune. The Tamilnad art of this time is an attempt to adapt the indigenous idiom to the needs of the British. There is no record of any resistance to the British example. In fact, the Indian artists were more than eager to supply their patrons the kind of painting they required. This adaptability to the demands of the day persists now.

“Company painting”, as this school is called, began early in the eighteenth century in Madras presidency, declined in the second half of the nineteenth, and lingered into the twentieth. It was “the largest original contribution by Indian artists before the modern deluge. Its use of watercolour as a technique, its adoption of western-style technique, its cult of realism and its concentration on the common people as prime subjects for painting broke sharply with the prevailing conventions. In this respect it is a clear precursor of modern trends and the first step towards that westernisation of style which is now a commonplace of contemporary Indian art”.

The East India Company and several individual Britons engaged Indian artists to draw temples and other monuments.

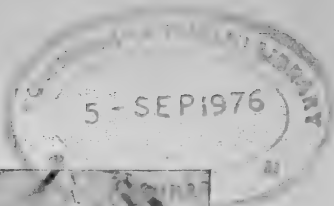
natural history objects and "quaint" categories of people and manners and also for their surveys of regions recently conquered. Colonel Colin Mackenzie, the first Surveyor-General of India, and an honoured name in the learned annals of the early eighteenth century, employed many Indian artists. Two names from these times are known, Muthukrishna of Tiruchi and "Ravanant Nag" of Madurai, more properly perhaps Ramanatha Nayak.

A number of professional British painters visited India and worked in cities like Madras, Calcutta and Lucknow. The most important of them were William Hodges, the Daniells, Johann Zoffany, Tilly Kettle, George Chinnery and John Smart. The last named is an important figure, for he was one of "the leaders of the art of miniature painting in England" and he "earned a steady income in Madras from 1785 to 1795, specialising in this fashionable technique". He must have influenced the art of ivory miniature which the Indian artists took up so avidly.

In a general way too these painters, of whom Kettle was the first, arriving in Madras in 1769, to be followed by some sixty others till 1820, influenced Company art. They introduced the water colour technique and also the genre of portrait painting on canvas. Their depictions of temples and other monuments must have made the Indian artists realise that, through mere familiarity, they had ignored a potent source of art. The Daniells drew the temple, the fort, and the Tirumalai Nayak Mahal in Madurai, Papanasam, Tiruchi, Tanjore and Mamallapuram. Hodges painted the Tanjore Big Temple, even whimsically adding a wind-mill wheel to the vimana in one of his works.

But these artists were birds of passage. Indians might have learnt from their works the elements of what their British patrons demanded. It was the serving British military and civil officers individually and the East India Company collectively who created Company painting.

This is an aspect of British Indian history which needs to be stressed. It is not generally realised that the British brought



*Portrait of a nobleman from Madurai-Painting
on paper. In the collection of Kora's Indigenous
Arts and Crafts Centre.*



A portrait study by a Tanjore artist. The print is in the collection of Kora's Indigenous Arts and Crafts Centre.

with them to India not only their commercial skill, which unexpectedly led to political dominion, but also a taste for the arts. Before early eighteenth century most British visitors to India had been eccentrics like Thomas Coryat, the "Odcombe man", or uncultivated traders like Ralph Fitch and John Mildenhall. But now a different kind of Britons arrived, men of parts and cultivation. They were influenced alike by Wordsworth's romantic revolt and by Gilpin's rebellion in art. The two combined to produce a new frame of mind, very different from the prim proprieties of the Augustan age, when, as Alexander Pope its arch-priest, wrote, "correctness grew our care".

The new age did not care for "correctness" in literature or art; in fact, it scorned it. It yearned for the unusual, for the "exotic". China became its principal source of this commodity, but India was a good second. To persons brought up on the art teachings of William Gilpin and Sir Uvedale Price, everything they saw in India as soon as they landed was matter for ecstatic astonishment. Gilpin was the evangel of the revolt. In his "Tours" (1782-1809) and "Three Essays" he laid down the principles which his followers incorporated in their own works and, what is more, demanded in the Indian artists they employed.

These principles "were concerned with precisely what style should be adopted when the picturesque was transferred to, paper". For example, "in sketching landscape gnarled trees should be placed on either side, a Gothic ruin included in the off-skip, meadows inserted in the background". The foreground should contain "creepers, stumps of blasted trees, stony banks, and rutted paths with shaggy animals and unkempt humans to add the requisite touch of life".

Armed with these precepts and anxious to convey to relatives in Britain some idea of the strange country in which they found themselves, a number of Britons turned to painting. This would give a better idea of this country than letters or journals, however well written. Thus, Indian artists found employment, but their had to satisfy their paymasters' desires.

Artistically, new arrivals were swept off their feet when they landed in India. On arriving in Madras in 1780, Mrs Eliza Fay wrote to her "dear friends" on April 13, "There is something uncommonly striking and grand in this town, and its whole appearance charms you from novelty as well as beauty. Many of the houses and public buildings are very extensive and elegant. They are covered with a sort of shell-lime which takes a polish like marble, and produces a wonderful effect. I could have fancied myself transported into Italy, so magnificently are they decorated, yet with the utmost taste".

Mrs. Fay even thought, what will astonish those who live in the city today, that many scenes in Madras resembled "the images that float on the imagination after reading fairy tales or the 'Arabian Nights' entertainment.....In fact, Madras is what I conceived Grand Cairo to be before I was so unlucky as to be undeceived".

Then follows a passage which expresses the characteristic feeling of the Britons, a feeling which influenced the art of the period. "This idea is heightened by the intermixture of inhabitants, by seeing Asiatic splendour combined with European taste exhibited around you on every side, under the forms of flowing drapery, stately palanquins, elegant carriages, innumerable servants, and all the pomp and circumstance of luxurious ease and unbounded wealth... There is something in the mild countenance and gentle manners of the Hindoos that interests me exceedingly".

In the vicinity of Madras Mrs Fay visited many "gentlemen's houses built in a showy style of architecture and covered with that beautiful chunam. As they are almost surrounded by trees, when you see these superb dwellings encompassed by a grove, a distant view of Madras with the sea and shipping so disposed as to form a perfect landscape, it is beyond comparison the most charming picture I ever beheld or could imagine".

About seven miles from Madras Mrs Fay saw a "prodigiously fine Banian tree, the singular nature of which is that its

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This painting on paper, depicting a man worshipping a Linga, is in the collection of Kora's Indigenous Arts and Crafts Centre.

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Davi appearing before a devotee. A paper painting, in the collection of Korā's Indigenous Arts and Crafts Centre.



This water colour painting on paper is in the collection of

branches bend down to the ground, take root and thence spring out anew, forming innumerable arches. I call it a vegetable cathedral".

Many other visitors plunged into the Indian quarters of the towns and there they saw, as Lady Maria Nugent, wife of Sir George Nugent, Commander-in-Chief in India, 1811-1815, and a "keen collector" of Company paintings, wrote, "copper vessels, crockery, rice, sugar, gods and goddesses, knives, muslins, silks all displayed together—all sorts of coloured turbans and dresses, and all sorts of coloured people—the crowd immense—the sacred Brahmin bull walking about and mixing with the multitude".

There were even more exotic things in the countryside. The British "travelled up the great rivers and saw strange kinds of shipping—high - prowed country boats with bales, and Indian pleasure boats with peacock or crocodile heads. As they moved through the towns and villages, they chanced upon picturesque festivals... They saw bridegrooms riding to their marriages and corpses carried to the burning ghats. Each season had its festivals gay with processions and with dancing crowds, and every city its individual character".

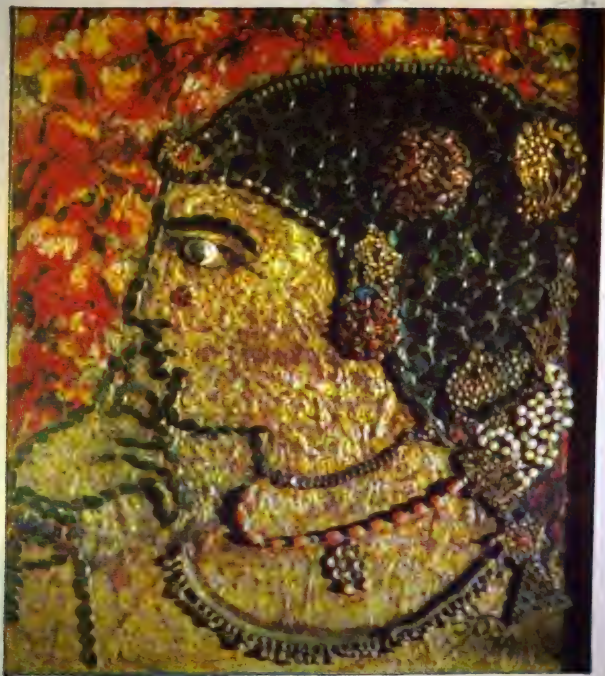
We Indians may think these raptures and ecstasies a little tiresome. But they were heart-felt and were not at all false. The Britons were really attracted by what they saw, particularly because of the contrast with the British scene. "How greatly does this Indian assemblage transcend our own!", wrote a military officer who travelled in northern and eastern India between 1825 and 1830, "Instead of red, rectangular buildings, square doors, square windows, formal lines of booths, and, what is worse than all, the dark, dingy dress of the figures,... we have here domes, minarets, fanciful architecture, and a costume, above all, flaunting in colours, set off with weapons, and formed, from the easy flow of its drapery, to adorn beauty and disguise deformity...Every hut, equipage, utensil and beast of India is picturesque".

Deepavali fascinated Emily Eden, the novelist and sister of Lord Auckland, the Governor-General from 1836 to 1842.

Visiting a cantonment, she wrote, "It was one of the prettiest, gayest feasts I have seen. The illuminations were so pretty... The Sepoys had illuminated there in all directions, and even scattered lamps on the ground all over the plain".

The British attitude to Indian life, which was reflected in the style and nature of Company art, may well be summed up in what Lady Falkland, whose husband was Governor of Bombay from 1848 to 1853, wrote on her arrival in the western metropolis, "Everywhere I see something new to look at every moment. What bits to sketch!. What effects here!. What colouring there!". Village life was even more promising. "What exquisite foregrounds for Ruysdael or Hobbimal. What splendid lights and solemn murky shades for Rembrandt!. What brutal, filthy clowns for Teniers!. And what villanous, hairy faqueers, rugged stumps, mouldering ruins and shocking old women for Salvator!".

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"Vikasitha Pushpa", another of Mr. Ramamurthi's paintings in the Tanjore style, is notable for its brilliant effects. In the collection of Dr. Helmut Ploog, of West Germany.

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This outline drawing is by a Tanjore artist. In the collection of Kora's Indigenous Arts and Crafts Centre.



A painting on paper, in the Tanjore technique, "Mahishasuramardini" is from the collection of Mr. M. Balakrishna Shetty of Madras.

Chapter V

The Tanjore artists were among the first in India to be influenced by the unexpected patronage of the British. Company painting appeared initially in Tanjore and spread first in the rest of Madras presidency and thence in other parts of expanding British India. There were some variations of style in the works produced in the various centres in the presidency.

It is possible to study this phase of Indian art in a detailed manner because there is abundant information. The sources are wholly from the British side. There is absolutely no Indian evidence at all. Indians were concerned to write about religion, letters, social life, but no reference to art has survived so far as I know. If the reader objects that I have devoted far too much attention to this phase of our art, my answer is that no art historian can wish not to utilise the information that is available.

The Tanjore artists adapted themselves readily enough to the British needs. Paintings of an early phase, most of which are in British collections, are said to be in the Deccani tradition of the eighteenth century. This judgment seems to be based on a "local tradition" in Tanjore that about 1775 many artists arrived from Hyderabad. The artists whom we met did not mention this. They merely said that their forefathers had arrived in south Tamilnad in the wake of the Nayaks in the sixteenth century. Conditions neither in Tanjore nor in Hyderabad were congenial for any artistic infusion at the time. In 1776 Tulaji was restored to the Tanjore throne by the British after a period of spoliation by the Nawab of Arcot. The Mysore wars also raged during this period.

However this might have been, the Tanjore idiom developed quickly. Local characters appear as subjects, "a Tanjore Girl and her Tickataw Men" (a danseuse and the musicians accompanying her) and two "Tanjorenes". Servants figure much: "a Coltery Grass-cutter", "a Teehan or Carpenter", a Gentoo Teakarah or Cooley Taylor, "a Koween or Basket

Maker". The colours are vivid. The subjects, always shown in a pair, are depicted in front or three-quarter view. Interestingly, black shadows are attached to each foot of the characters, and the eye sockets are heavily shaded.

The final Tanjore style which the artists made for the British has for its features "naturalistic clouds", bushes and palm trees on the horizon, shading of the figures, and attachment of curving shadows to the feet. In a further development, backgrounds cease to be coloured and become empty, and the subjects are treated realistically. The colours are more sombre. Water colours are used, and not gouache. The surface is European paper. The patrons commissioned sets, and apparently the artists repaid the compliment by painting them too. This was the style which the Tanjore painters used in the nineteenth century, a style which spread to Tiruchi.

This is a style very different from the indigenous one as evolved over the centuries. There are fundamental differences in subject, surface, colour, outlook and nearly everything else. The Indian artists were compelled to accept them. But this style has not lasted and except that modern westernised Indian artists do not choose religious subjects, it has had no influence.

How the Indian painters were made to adopt the new style is explained to some extent in a note which Captain Gold added to a reproduction in his "Oriental Drawings" published in 1800, of a painting, "A Lame Beggar and his Family". Though the note is rather long, it is necessary to reproduce it, "The accompanying is the fac-simile of a painting done by one of their ablest artists, well known by the title of Tanjore Moochy, and famed throughout the country, not so much for the specimens of his own invention, as for his great skill and ingenuity in imitating the finest miniatures from the European pencil, so as to deceive persons of good taste, if not the connoisseur. The Moochys, or Artists of India, usually paint in the stile represented in the present drawing, but in body colour, and sometimes finish their pictures in the delicate and laboured manner of a miniature; though they at the same time are entirely devoid of truth in colouring and perspective, and constantly err on the side of ornament



*A water colour study of a boy. In the collection
of Kora's Indigenous Arts and Crafts Centre.*



"A Yogi" This Tanjore water colour is in the collection of Kora's Indigenous Arts and Crafts Centre.

and gaudiness of dress; excepting where the subject does not admit of much finery and decoration, as with the beggars; and then they possess considerable merit as to costume and character".

Gold then explains how the British patrons made the artists change their style, "On the suggestion of the Europeans, some of the country artists have been induced to draw series of the most ordinary casts or tribes, each picture representing a man and his wife, with the signs or marks of distinction on their foreheads, and not in their common, but holiday clothes. This of course does not familiarize their appearance, but disguises the character so much, that were it not for some particular badge or implement, such as the peon's belt, and the golden tea kettle in the cook's hands, it would not be an easy matter to discriminate their occupations. These drawings, not withstanding, do credit to the uninstructed authors of them".

This passage indicates what the British patrons expected in the paintings they paid for and insisted on. In effect, what they demanded was Indian subjects treated in European fashion. They did not require Indian idioms.

Frequent are the lamentations of the patrons at the deficiencies of Indian art in the early stages. The main lack was absence of perspective and taste. Maria Graham, herself an artist of some attainments (she drew some of the Mamallapuram monuments), wrote of the Indian miniature technique, "The specimens of Hindu art I have seen are minute imitations of nature, on a scale more diminutive than our common miniatures; but there is a delicacy of handling about them, that seems like the remains of a more perfect art". But what was regrettable was the absence of perspective, "harmony" and light.

Maria Graham wrote in the 1810's. But her complaint had been made some sixty years earlier. One John Cleland wrote about 1750, "The Gentoos...are Passionately fond and curious of Painting, and yet have in the course of Ages, made an inconsiderable progress in comparison with the European perfection...On my raising a very Natural Objection to the Rudeness and imperfection of Draughts and the little Probability of a Resemblance holding in such raw unfinished pieces,

it was answered me that the Indian Painters in General could not attain to the just disposition of Light and Shade, nor manage a large outline with any Exactness, but that they excelled in hitting a likeness in miniature (of which it is certain I have seen many Instances) and they pretend that no European Pictures they have seen have hit the turn or Colour of Face peculiar to the Mogul tribe”.

A similar indictment was drawn up by another writer about 1807. An indigenous artist “may display great ingenuity, consummate patience, and often, great delicacy; but with respect to design, taste, composition, perspective, consistency, and harmony; in all these, whether in drawing, sculpture, or in any mode of representation, he will prove himself to be completely ignoramus.” Since the paymaster was so censorious, it might be thought that the Indian artists would receive short shrift. But the two came to some kind of terms. The British needed paintings and knew that they could have these made as they wanted. The Indians needed patrons and were willing to adapt themselves.

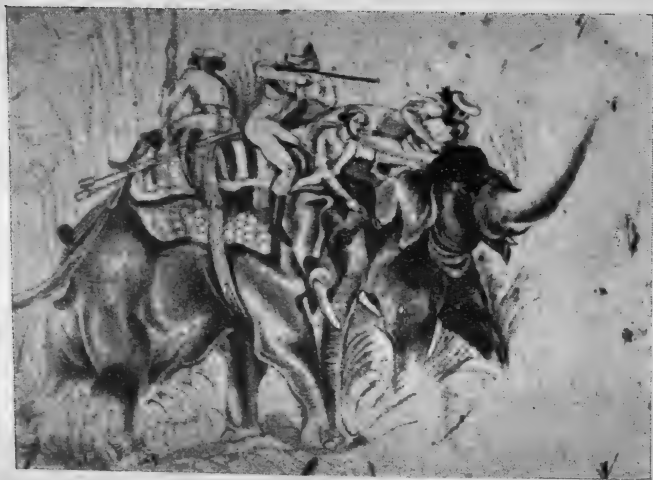
Thus it was that “Company painting” flourished. Apart from water colours on paper, ivory miniatures and paintings of Gods and Goddesses were made, the latter mostly for Hindus. These were the distinctive “Tanjore paintings” in search of which Mr Ramamurthi and I made our journey..

The names of only a few of the Tanjore artists have survived. Portraits of the Rajas of Pudukottah were painted by Ramaswami Maistry and Govindaswami Maistry, both of Tanjore, in the nineteenth century. Earlier, in the middle of the eighteenth, “Mootoo Kistnah” seems to have been active in Tiruchi, painting topographical scenes for the British. In Madurai “Ravanant Nag” is known.

Many artists worked in Madras. The centre of production was the area around the Sri Kandaswami temple in Park Town, where today there are many picture frame shops, relics of the old tradition. It is said that Tanjore paintings were taken to the harbour and sold to ship passengers.



"Kerala vanitha", a painting on glass, is in the collection of Kora's Indigenous Arts and Crafts Centre.



This sketch in black and white of a hunting scene by an artist of Tanjore is in the collection of Kora's Indigenous Arts and Crafts Centre.

CHAPTER VI

What has been discussed so far relates to art in Tamilnad from the advent of the Nayaks to about a century ago, when the British influence was at its height. The artists whom we sought out continue the practices and traditions of this long period, but with the inevitable adaptations to the modern ethos.

Their art includes mural painting in temples, the typical embossed and encrusted painting on wood, and colouring "sudais" and "vahanas". As far as we could ascertain, ivory, mica and glass paintings are no longer produced. But a few examples have survived from the recent past. These arts have fallen into desuetude mainly because of the economic factor. Inflation has considerably reduced patronage which, in any case, is no longer permanent and steady as in the olden days, but fitful and uncertain. Modern artists say that graphics are the most popular form today because people can buy them at prices ranging between Rs. 25 and Rs. 50. The other media are beyond the means of most people.

We were able to ascertain the names of two temple artists of the last and early present centuries. We heard from the artists of the precarious nature of their calling. We also heard of their quarrels with soulless bureaucracy. The outlook for these arts is far from bright.

We learnt from their descendants that the paintings on wood of "Tiruvilayadal" themes in the corridor overlooking the Golden Lily tank in the Madurai temple were drawn by Ramakrishna Nayudu and his son, Muthu Azagiri Nayudu, about a century and a half ago. These wooden paintings have now been removed to the temple art museum in the temple. The same artists painted the wedding of Sri Minakshi, also showing

Rani Mangamma, and other scenes on the Kizhi mandapa. We were also able to ascertain that it was G. Viraraghavalu Raju who painted the murals in the Sri Ramaswami temple in Kumbakonam. These identifications were the highlights of our visit.

We heard about, and saw for ourselves, the poor economic conditions of the descendants of these great artists, those of today and of yesterday. With a few exceptions, these artists live in poverty. They grasp at any opportunity of earning or adding to their meagre incomes. Their forefathers had adapted themselves to British taste, and they strive to follow the current art fashions. But not a few have given up what they no doubt consider a hopeless task. No one who has seen them in their poverty will be tempted to blame them. What is heartening is that the survivors, by and large, still refuse to compromise with principle and tradition.

It is quite possible that, even when their arts were flourishing, the artists were not very affluent. The Tanjore "Moochy" was not a rich man. But he was at least buoyed up by the patronage of Raja and noble and by the consciousness of work well done and appreciated. These supports to pride and self-confidence are now gone. The artists are now struggling against general indifference and, what they resent more bitterly, the misconceived notions of revival and restoration which the bureaucracy promulgates from time to time. It is a melancholy paradox that they have to contend with well meant, but misconceived, ideas.

It is a testimony to the tenacity of the hereditary principle in Hindu society that even in an age of levelling the arts have descended from father to son in regular succession. Until the recent disruptive days, there was no question of the male members of a Raju or Nayudu art family abandoning the hereditary profession. This principle is collapsing now. In Madurai we met a member of one of these families who is employed with the railways. It was with no great pride, but rather with wry embarrassment, that he told us of the decline. We heard of another man who went to Burma as a telegraphist, but apparently contrived to continue to practise his traditional



This water colour on paper depicting Lord Bhairava is in the collection of Kora's Indigenous Arts and Crafts Centre.



"Madurai Minakshi". This water colour on paper is from Madurai. In the collection of Kora's Indigenous Arts and Crafts Centre.

calling there in intervals of time. We, however, gathered the impression that, if only they could, these artists, young and old, like to continue in the family profession. We did hear an old and reasonably successful artist declare that he would give it up if he could. But that was because of his irritation with the bureaucracy, a momentary feeling, it may be believed.

Most of the artists whom we met live in poor circumstances. Their houses are old, even ramshackle. Many seem to have large families. They speak Telugu at home and Tamil outside. They are ignorant of English, a fact which must place them at a disadvantage when dealing with foreigners and Indians from other parts of the country. Some of them are quite depressed. We could see tell-tale signs of anxiety and misery on the face of the wife of one of them. This family lives in a single room on the first floor of a warren of similar rooms in an overcrowded street. Husband, wife and daughter all live, cook and sleep in the same room. If art is to flourish in these circumstances, it must do so despite them.

The Madurai artists live mainly in Chitrakara Street, appropriately named. Salaikara Street, a narrower road, branches off it. It is said that Tirumalai Nayak laid out these streets and peopled them with artist families. It might well have been so, but that great Nayak often gets credit for many actions he might not have performed. These artists know of only one Nayak of Madurai, and that is Tirumalai. A successor of his, Vijayaranga Chokkanatha, was equally, if not more, active in patronising the arts, but the poor man is not held in much remembrance today.

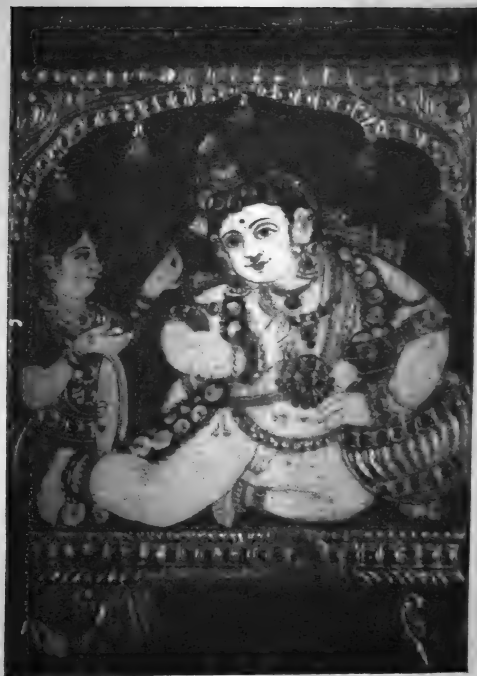
Chitrakara Street, not far from the temple, is only a glorified lane. Not all the houses here are occupied by artist families. Commerce has invaded the street, introducing an incongruity. But there is still an ancient tree, and there is an old world atmosphere about parts of the street. Of an evening the residents foregather under the tree. The scene is an animated one, worthy of the brush of one of the artists. Many of the families in the street are inter-related. It need not be supposed that this fact makes for harmony. We heard a few complaints of bad faith and doubtful dealing among the Tanjore artists.

From our point of view, the most important building in the street is a "Ramanujakudam", which may be described as a community prayer hall. Hinduism does not know of congregational worship, but these institutions bring fellow-sectarians together. The sense of solidarity is still strong.

The "kudam" is a rectangular hall with alcoves in the rear wall. It contains innumerable pictures of divinities, most of them Tanjore paintings. Most of these would appear to have been made at least half a century ago. It is a reasonable deduction that they were painted by people then living in this street. The main picture in the central alcove is encrusted with glass pieces and the like. The others are simply embossed. The hall also contains the inevitable garish calendar pictures.

The "kudam" is a surviving representative of a system which, till the recent past, aided in fostering Tanjore art not only in Tamilnad but also in Andhra Pradesh and elsewhere in southern India. Till the other day there were few villages without a "kudam" of this type, without a "bhajana mandapa" of some kind. The artists worked in these buildings because there was not enough space at home. These halls required Tanjore paintings, and there was always the need to renovate old work. There was steady employment for the Tanjore artists.

There was another village institution which fostered the demand. On important festivals like Sri Rama Navami, the richer villagers used to erect "pandals" in front of their houses. These were adorned with paintings and, in parts of Andhra Pradesh, with "kalamkari" cloth hangings too. These would be on display as long as the festivals lasted. At the end, they would be taken down and preserved, to be brought out for the next occasion. The local temple too needed paintings. The village magnates also liked to adorn their houses with them. These four institutions, the "kudam", the temple, the needs of festivals and of the rich, kept the demand for Tanjore paintings alive throughout this period. Except for the temples, and that too only to a limited extent, these sources have failed now.



"Navanitha Krishna". A beloved theme of the old Tanjore artists. In the collection of Mrs. Kamala Sehgal, New Delhi.



"Krishna with a cat" is a traditional Tanjore painting, the work of a Tanjore palace artist. In the collection of Kora's Indigenous Arts and Crafts Centre.

There was another important source of demand, but it was confined to Madurai. This was the palace. Tirumalai Nayak is the King Charles' head of the recollections of the seartists. He crops up at every opportunity, an indication of the influence of his personality and career. There is no similar sentimental attachment to the Maratha palace in Tanjore, though Sarfoji was a very active patron indeed.

The artists whom we met were very willing to talk to us. Mr Ramamurthi's reputation as an artist himself was no doubt a help. We talked with them in their houses, in studios, and even, in one case, the "mukhamandapa" of a temple where one of them was carrying on his activities. We made detailed enquiries about the history of their art, its great men in the olden days, the present prospects, and themselves. Always the answers were full and frank. But it is not to be supposed that what these relatively simple and unsophisticated people said could be set down as it was spoken. Their remarks were often disjointed, and sometimes contradictory.

Mr Sarangapani Raju of Tanjore is over seventy-five years old and, therefore, may be considered the doyen of the Tanjore artists. He and two of his sons work in a temple in an old part of Tanjore, near their house. He was instructor at the Government Training Centre for Painting Pictures on Wood in the town. The institution functioned for two years, and no longer. How any art could be revived in two years is a question which does not appear to have occurred to the bureaucracy.

Mr Sarangapani Raju is not unused to visitors, official or unofficial, indigenous or foreign. He answered our questions with practised fluency. He said that he usually paints on jack wood. On it is imposed cloth or paper. Sometimes he works directly on wood. The cloth is unbleached handloom. Paper or cloth is affixed to the wooden surface with a substance made of a kind of white lime and glue. Then the outlines are drawn.

Most of the artists whom we met professed that they drew the outlines freehand. They would not admit that they made tracings, obviously believing that to do so. was somewhat disreputable. But there are in Mr Ramamurthi's collections a number of drawings which were used in tracing. These drawings were placed on the surface to be painted. Holes were made with a pin along the margins of the picture. Coal ash was then sprinkled over the holes. This produced an outline on the surface, which was then drawn with the brush.

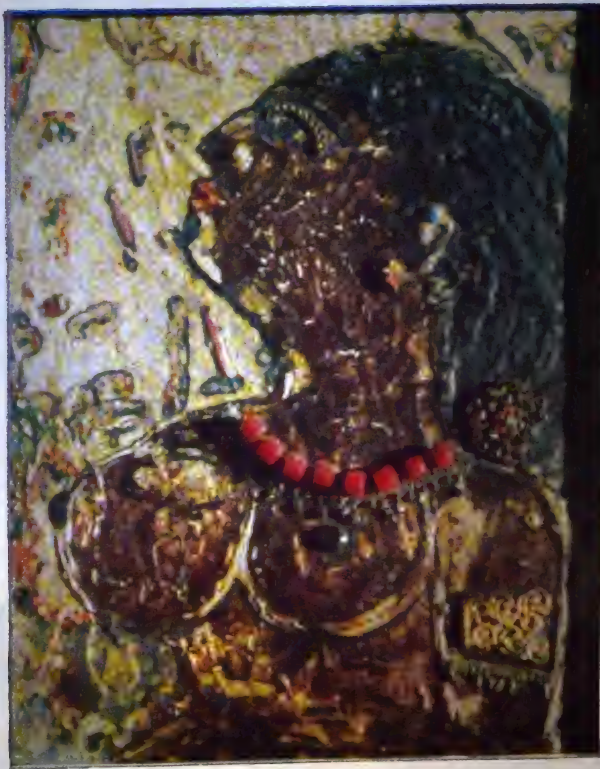
Tanjore paintings are notable for their adornment in the form of glass pieces embedded in parts of them. In work made for Rajas and nobles in the olden days precious stones were used. For wealthy patrons today too these are used on demand. It is all a question of economics.

The colours used are nowadays chemical ones, but in the past only natural ones were applied. The traditional artist has something like abhorrence of, or at least disgust for, chemical colours. The modern artist has no objection to them; in fact, he prefers them on the ground that they are far easier and cheaper to procure. The traditionalists object that they are corrosive and garish.

The old artists used to mix their natural colours with "sudai". The modern ones have, of course, no need to do so. What has survived is the convention in regard to the choice of colour for painted personality or object. For outlines dark brown is usually used. Red is favoured for the background. Some scholars say that a red background is the distinctive mark of Tanjore paintings, but we were told that green is sometimes used. Lord Vishnu, appropriately enough, is coloured blue, and Lord Nataraja chalk white. Yellow is used for the Goddesses. The sky, of course, is blue, but black is employed on occasion. There are conventions in regard to the use of embossing and bejewelling. But these do not appear to be followed very strictly these days. Often individual preference settles the matter.



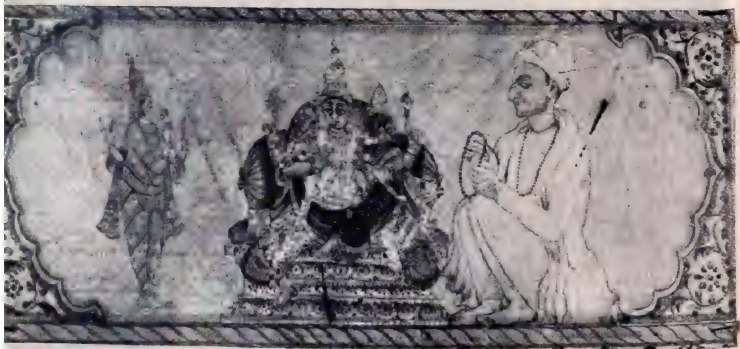
*Mysore painting, Tanjore technique on paper
"Mother and child" From the collection of Mr.
Seetharam Rao of Madras.*



This subject, "Tribal woman", was frequently utilised by the old Tanjore painters. But Mr. Ramamurthi achieves effects which they did not know of. In the collection of Dr. Helmut Ploog, of West Germany.



*"Maduraiveeran". A traditional Tanjore work.
In the collection of Kora's Indigenous Arts and
Crafts Centre.*



"A Mahratta king worshipping Lord Vishnu". This manuscript painting is in the collection of Kora's Indigenous Arts and Crafts Centre.



"Vikasitha Pushpa", an abstract, depicts the beauty of womanhood. The artist has brought this out effectively. In the collection of Mr. D. H. Captain.

In the astonishing manner of old times, which still survives these artists have the "agamas" and the "silpasastras" by heart. But there are indications that the practice is breaking down. Certainly some modern artists who have no use for it are scornful of the ability of the traditionalists to follow it.

All the artists whom we met were agreed that Tanjore painting takes much time to produce. It involves infinite labour. But the estimates of time varied from artist to artist. One said that he needed about two weeks, another just five days, a third that it depended on the weather, quicker in summer when paint could dry out sooner than in the other months. A fourth said that, if the patron demanded quick results, they could be produced to order.

These are the general impressions we gathered from our discussions with some of the contemporary inheritors of a great renown. We could sense their pride in the achievements of their ancestors, a pride cherished the more for the contrast with their present circumstances. I now turn to an account of the individual artists we met.

Mr. Sarangapani Raju is a practical minded person, who does not live in the past, though he is a man of achievements. Except for stating that his father-in-law, Viraraghava Raju, had produced the murals in the Sri Ramaswami temple in Kumbakonam, his talk was all of the present.

Mr. Sarangapani Raju said that his subjects were always divinities, mainly Vaishnava. They include Navanitha Krishna, that distinctive subject of Tanjore paintings, Sri Rama's coronation, Amman, Andal, and sometimes Nataraja. He laid stress on the fact that he always drew the outlines freehand, but said that nowadays some artists trace them. As we were to discover in the following days, freehand drawing is something like a point of honour with these artists.

Mr. Sarangapani Raju's two sons follow his profession, but they also find scope in commercial art. In fact, when we went to the temple which serves as their studio, we found them at work on an enamel board containing lists of prices which

shops display. The sons also make bowls embedded with pieces of glass or other bright objects, said to be popular today. The second son was employed making the solution which would be applied to the pictures with a brush.

It was a different scene we met in Tiruchi. V. Narasimhalu Raju works in a photographic studio. He is a son of Viraraghava Raju, the artist of the Kumbakonam murals. He is apt to live in the past which, to him, was better than the present. He very kindly showed us the drawings in his possession which were used to make tracings. He has a large collection of them, and he cherishes them as a heirloom. He gave us a photograph of his father, which is reproduced in this book. He has also an ivory portrait of him, and it was touching to hear that he worships it.

Mr. Narasimhalu Raju told us that Gopalaswami Raju, his grandfather, had been attached to the Tanjore palace as artist. This would place his lifetime about the middle of the last century when, though the Mahratta Rajas had lost political power, they maintained the religious and artistic traditions of the dynasty. Viraraghava Raju worked in the Kumbakonam temple in 1937-38. He completed the task in a year, his son remembers, working day and night. He was helped by V. Govindaraju Raju and V. Rajamannar Raju. Narasimhalu was then a little boy and he helped fetch and carry things. He remembers that the "contract" was worth Rs. 4,500, a big sum for those days. Viraraghava also painted the vahanas in the Nachiarkoil temple and he brought Rs. 3,000 home at the conclusion of the venture. It was interesting to learn that Gopalaswami had made the image of Garuda in the fourth prakara of the Srirangam temple. It is of "sudai". Viraraghava painted it.

We met another Tanjore artist in Tiruchi. S. Varadarajulu Raju told us that he took between a week and ten days to complete a painting. But the duration depends on the size and the adornments of the commissioned painting. This interview was a brief one.

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"Star World" shows what fine effects can be created by applying the Tanjore technique to landscape. As in "Sandhya Raga" (the frontispiece), Mr. Ramamurthi has captured the spirit of night. In the artist's collection.

In Madurai the Tanjore artists are Nayudus, not Rajus. But they too speak Telugu at home. We met Mr. B. Subbiah in the Kudal Azagar temple, where he was painting the one hundred and eight Vaishnava "divyadesas" during the renovation. He said that he draws the pictures freehand. He paints on paper added to teak or rosewood. He favours red for the background, and he uses the same colour in addition to yellow for pictures of Thayar. Gold leaf is no longer encrusted because it is far too costly. It takes him five days in summer to make a painting of Navanitha Krishna. More time is needed in the other months because "obbal", the Tamil term for the embossing substance, takes longer to settle down when the weather is not very hot.

Mr. Subbiah used chemical colours in drawing the temple murals. He had to do so because the old natural, or earth, colours are not available easily or economically. But he knows how to prepare many of them. This was how green was prepared in the olden days. Put tiny copper pieces and a quantity of lime juice in a pot, topped by a sand layer of two feet. Keep for two months. You will get the substance for green, which will endure long. At least the older artists today know that chemical colours are neither attractive nor long lasting. However, they have no choice but to use them.

Mr. Subbiah has had considerable experience in painting temple murals. He painted eighty-eight panels in the Palani temple. He also embellished the Minakshi temple in Madurai and various fanes in Tiruchengode, Chettinad, Papanasam and other Tirunelveli district towns. He is, thus, an artist of considerable achievement and experience. It was, therefore, melancholy to hear him say that he would like to give up the profession. This is because he resents the carping and patronising attitude of some official engineers. While inspecting his murals, these persons would often say that they could be made more cheaply than Mr Subbiah charged. These remarks humiliate him.

It was from Mr Subbiah's son, Mr. Visvanathan, that we heard of an important fact. The "Tiruvilayadal" paintings on wood, which were on the walls of the mandapa overlooking the Golden Lily tank in the Madurai temple, were painted by

Ramakrishna Nayudu, the grandfather of Mr Subbiah. Ramakrishna Nayudu, thus, becomes the second Tanjore painter of a past era whom we were able to identify during our enquiries. The first was Viraraghava Raju who had painted the murals in the Sri Rama temple in Kumbakonam.

Ramakrishna Nayudu was assisted by two of his sons, Venkatachala Nayudu and Muthu Azagiri Nayudu, who added the final touches to the paintings. The trustees of the Madurai temple then were Nagappa Chettiar and Venkatachala Chettiar. We saw a drawing of the former in Mr Visvanathan's possession. It is of a typical Nagarattar magnate of the past century. We were told that an oil painting of the good man was being made at the time of our visit.

Ramakrishna Nayudu also painted the ceiling of the "Kizhi mandapa" and nearby areas in the Madurai temple. One of his paintings is well known. It depicts Goddess Minakshi's wedding. There are two human figures in the group, Rani Mangammal and her Dalavai. In the famous temple in Kadirgama, in Sri Lanka, Ramakrishna Nayudu painted scenes from the mythology of Lord Muruga. He also worked in Colombo and in Srivilliputtur.

Mr. Visvanathan explained to us how "sudai" sculptures, so plentifully seen in the vimanas and gopuras, are made. The core of the sculpture is brick. Lime is added to it, and the substance modelled. The figures are then coloured. Architectural members like the sala and the kuta are made in sizes in proportion to the neighbouring figures so that artistic balance is preserved.

In going to work in Sri Lanka, Ramakrishna Nayudu was not being exceptional. We heard of P.Chengalvaraya Nayudu who painted in Rangoon. This artist went to Kerala from Madurai some one hundred and fifty years ago to work in the palaces there. His pictures are said to be in the Cochin palace. His family was called the "Malayalam family". He also worked on the Suchindram rajagopura. He later went to Burma. We also heard of Muthukrishna Nayudu, also from Madurai, who taught Ravi Varma how to mix colours. He died in 1946.



"Virahini", another Tanjore painting, shows Mr. Ramamurthi as an expositor of philosophical ideas. In the collection of Mr. Jayavardhanavelu, of Coimbatore.

There is an oil painting, "Mother and Child", marked as made in West Asia and dated 1882. It was made by G. Govindarajulu Nayudu. It is now in the collection of Mr. Jayavaradhanavelu in Coimbatore.

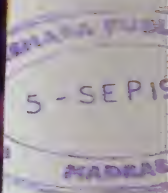
We were also told of Natham Subba Nayudu and his son, N. S. Ramaswami Nayudu, who worked in the Chettinad temples. Both are dead now.

CHAPTER VII

Our visit to Madurai and other towns was for the purpose of studying the current state of the Tanjore school of art about which little is known and the traditions of which are being eroded. My companion had a second object. His visit was in the nature of a return to a field of success. He has done much to revive the idiom and he wished to renew his acquaintance with the current artists.

Mr. Ramamurthi has evolved new forms out of some old schools. I have already referred to his success in modernising and thereby reviving "kalamkari" cloth making. He has performed similar service for the Tanjore school of painting. Its importance is considerable. A man of piety and tradition, Mr Ramamurthi does not wish the religious themes of the Tanjore paintings to disappear. They have held the field for centuries and will continue to be popular. But, like other aspects of human endeavour, art must adapt itself to changing conditions. The modern temper also seeks subjects other than religious. If the Tanjore school is to survive, it must also express itself through portraits, landscapes and, there is no reason why it should not, the "abstract". There is nothing in the technique to render this impossible. What has stood in the way is the conservatism of the artists.

Mr. Ramamurthi realised the possibilities when, for some ten years he was engaged in restoring old damaged Tanjore paintings in the collection of Mr. Kasturi Gopalan in Madras. Mr. Gopalan was one of the earliest patrons of Mr Ramamurthi, who preserves grateful recollections of his kindness, generosity and concern for religious art. While working as a restorer, Mr. Ramamurthi studied the technique closely. He found that it could be adapted to produce landscape, portrait and the like. He has created many Tanjore paintings in the new mode. In recent years he has progressed to abstract ideas and philosophical notions.



Mr. Ramamurthi, who was responsible for reviving the virtually extinct craft of "kalamkari" cloth making, has applied the technique to illustrate a philosophical concept, the same as that drawn upon in illustration no. two. The "kalamkari" technique can be used to achieve similar effects. In the artist's collection.

In this artist's hands the Tanjore technique acquires a new meaning and significance. It can express the most profound emotions of the heart, and it can recapture the spirit of landscape, whether of mountain or starry night. Since Mr. Ramamurthi is adept at many forms of art, he is able to perceive their potentialities and adapt them to changed circumstances.

I discuss first some of his abstracts. One of his most imaginative works is "Naristhanabara". It is based on a verse in Sankara's "Gita Govindam" which exposes the ugly physical basis of human beauty. The painting is a long rectangular piece depicting a woman with red bulges at various parts of her body. These are raw lumps of flesh. The painting indicates more eloquently than words can that beauty is only skin deep. The colours used are red, blue, green and black. The embossing substance was not what is customarily used in Tanjore paintings. It was made by boiling for three hours a mixture of "guggilam", "sambrani" powder and raw linseed oil.

The resultant substance is very adhesive. The traditional artist added silver leaf to appropriate parts of the painting. Now Mr. Ramamurthi, in creating this painting, has used an entirely new technique in the use of materials. In the place of the traditional "guggilam" adhesive and silver leaf, he has successfully used a mixture of shellac varnish and a yellow powder to get that golden yellow sheen. The embossing remains durable even if the painting is washed many times.

This Tanjore painting was created in 1975. Four years earlier, Mr. Ramamurthi had essayed the same theme, but in a different medium, "kalamkari" cloth. This piece displays the same virtuosity of feeling. Its colours are durable.

Mr. Ramamurthi's skill in delineating psychological feelings is expressed splendidly in "Virahini", created in 1974. It is a perceptive study of a woman pining for her absent husband. This theme is an old one in Indian tradition and literature, as old as Kalidasa. But Mr. Ramamurthi has, remarkably enough, been able to express some new psychological aspects of this ancient theme. This work is in the collection of Mr. Jayavardhanavelu in Coimbatore.

A third abstract is "Vikasitha Pushpa". It depicts a girl in all the beauty of young womanhood. Mr. Ramamurthi plumbs the depths of her heart. This is a masterpiece of psychological portraiture. It was made in 1975 and is now in the collection of Mr. D.S. Capten.

"Sandhya raga" displays another aspect of Mr. Ramamurthi's versatility. Ever experimenting with materials, he has used clay as the embossing substance, and the experiment has been successful. Silver leaf has been applied and shellac varnish used. The result is delicate. There are the effects of a water colour.

The old Tanjore artists restricted their scope to divine figures. Mr. Ramamurthi has applied the technique to human personalities or types. The adaptation has proved effective. Mr. Ramamurthi has shown that it is possible to depict striking human features through this medium. The old "company" artists had, as I have already said, done this, but their work lacks the sophistication and, above all, the psychological profundities Mr. Ramamurthi has been able to achieve.

The most striking of Mr. Ramamurthi's essays in this medium is "Devadasi", made in 1971. It happens to be Mr. Ramamurthi's first attempt in the Tanjore technique. There are two points of interest in this work. The first is what may be called the human aspect. The "Devadasi" was a conventional figure, but this painting has new life and meaning. Secondly, the technique consists in applying small, old jewellery bits, various coloured stones and metals as the embossing objects applied over an adhesive. It is remarkable how these materials harmonise with the spirit of the human personality depicted. This highly interesting work is in the collection of Mr. Naresh Kotak, of Baxi and Co., Madras.

The artist utilised the experience he had gained in creating another bold innovation. This is "Tribal Woman", made in 1974 and now in the collection of Dr Helmut Ploog of West Germany. Again, this is a conventional subject, but, again, what attracts notice is the new



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In applying the Tanjore technique to abstract notions, Mr. Ramamurthi has broken exciting new ground. This work, "Naristhanabara", is based on a verse of Sri Sankara exposing the ugly basis of physical beauty. In the artist's collection.

significance it has acquired in Mr. Ramamurthi's hands. To the same year belongs another essay. "Young Woman". The colour scheme here is striking. There is a deft use of black, red, brown and bright. This is another aspect of Mr. Ramamurthi's skill.

That the technique can be used in creating landscapes of quality is proved by three works of Mr. Ramamurthi's, "Landscape at Night" is a fine rendering of the view from Tirumala of the Chandragiri hills, with the Swarnamukhi flowing through them. The river has grateful associations for Mr. Ramamurthi who has, as it were, been acquainted with it in Srikalahasti when engaged in reviving the "kalamkari" art. This painting was shown in a Madras exhibition and attracted praise. There is sombre darkness about this landscape as it were visited by the ghosts of Vijayanagar greatness. This feeling has been very skilfully produced by the embossings.

A second landscape depicts the rays of the setting sun gilding a field. Autumnal melancholy broods over the scene. Appropriately, no gold or silver leaf has been used, and this Tanjore painting looks like an oil colour. In a variation of the materials used, and Mr. Ramamurthi is ceaselessly experimenting with them, tempera powder and shellac varnish have been employed here. The colours are red, yellow and dark blue, the first predominating. "Star world" reflects a world of serenity with clusters of the heavenly luminaries shining down on it. This is an evocative scene, depicting the calm of night in a hilly terrain.

These works of Mr. Ramamurthi are a great advance on the simple and unsophisticated production of the past century. There were what may be called many subsidiary Tanjore arts like water colour on paper, mica painting and pencil drawing. Mr. Ramamurthi has a large collection of these artefacts. These works have influenced his own style. Many of them are works of art in their own right.

The micas have simple themes, but their artistic value is considerable, for the modelling and expressiveness are splendid. The water colours indicate European influence to a

great extent. Some are obviously copied from photographs. But the others, though in a medium not very old or rooted in the consciousness of our people, are pleasing. They have much of the delicacy of the miniature. The themes are historic buildings like the Tanjore palace and the Tiruchi fort, many of the old professions, and natural history. It need hardly be added that mythology is the principal source of the themes.

Mr. Ramamurthi's large and varied collection illustrates the rich variety of South Indian folk art. It abounds in wood carvings, puppet artefacts, old and new "kalamkari" cloth, and Tanjore paintings. Two thoughts occur to one viewing this collection.

The first is that, while most of our villagers are poor, they have not lost their inheritance of artistic talent. In almost every village, even in these devitalised days, there are able craftsmen in many a medium, wood, leather, cloth. This skill ought not to be allowed to decay. Official organisations are doing what they can, but they cannot be very successful by their very nature. Craftsmen complain of the indifference of many officials. I have mentioned the incomprehensible fact that the Government training centre for painting pictures on wood in Tanjore was allowed to last only two years. Only a bureaucrat with no understanding of, or sympathy for, temperamental artists could imagine that the art could be revived in two years. I have also quoted a well-known painter of Madurai expressing a desire to abandon his hereditary profession because he can no longer endure the contumelious attitude of some of the officials who "pass" his work. No artist or craftsman can be expected to put up with this attitude. If anybody does, or seems to, it is only because economically he has no choice.

But here is Mr. Ramamurthi, not an official, but an artist like one of themselves, who could understand their innermost feelings and could talk their language. I could see during our visit that they immediately opened out their hearts to him. The same perceptive understanding permeates this collection that an artist and a friend of artists has assembled.

The second thought which occurs to one viewing his collection is the surprise that it should have been formed at all. Artists seldom collect the works of other artists, much less the humble efforts of unknown artisans in villages. But Mr. Ramamurthi, who comes of a village family and is proud of the fact, has an instinctive understanding of the rural artist. He has acquired a national renown, but he never forgets that, so to say, it is the village that has made him. There are folk influences in his work. His innovative and questing spirit has enabled him to perpetuate the lovely old forms. This is the significance of an artist's collection of artefacts of village art.
